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## Cast your ballot

by Will Nicholls



The Harper government passed the so-called Fair Elections Act last spring, just in time for this federal election. It's anything but fair. Introduced in February 2014 by then-minister for democratic reform Pierre Poilievre, the new law requires potential voters to show two pieces of ID to cast a ballot. In addition, at least one of the IDs must show a current street address. The voter information card is no longer valid.

This handicaps many voters. How many people on welfare would have the necessary identification? Your health-care card doesn't show an address, same for Social Insurance card. How many can afford a driver's license or passport? How about first-time voters like the youth or recent immigrants?

Then there's the First Nations peoples. Some reserves don't have street addresses, so voters in those communities now have to find someone with proper ID to sign an oath corroborating the voter lives in that riding. Further limiting the opportunity to vote an individual may only attest for one other voter, though the band office can also fill out a form certifying a voter's address.

There are valid concerns that voters will misunderstand or be overwhelmed by the new ID requirements, and find themselves turned away at the polls.

Some may say that First Nations shouldn't vote because it's not their government or they feel they won't change anything. I would argue otherwise as government decisions affect your lives.

Not participating only allows them to perpetuate the legacy of broken

treaties, a lack of housing, a lack of potable water, poor school facilities, low graduation rates and resources, high incarceration rates of First Nations people, lack of consultation before introducing legislation affecting our people and a host of other issues.

The hypocrisy of the Harper government is blatant. For example, the Prime Minister's Office refuses to reveal how many staffers are paid more than \$150,000 a year. The government claims that providing details on PMO salaries would constitute the release of "personal information."

That certainly wasn't a concern when they imposed the First Nations Financial Transparency Act, which obligates public disclosure of salaries of chiefs and band employees.

This may be why Canada's Aboriginal population have low voter turnout rates – 41% in the last federal election in 2011. But these same reasons should motivate our people to vote.

The Assembly of First Nations identified 51 ridings that could be affected by the First Nations vote. In 2011 there were 308 ridings in all and the Conservative Party won a bare majority with 159 seats, giving them unlimited power.

We have seen what Harper and company has done with the power. The (Un)Fair Elections Act may make it harder for us to vote, but we should look at it as just another challenge to overcome.

We can make a difference, and this time, we must. The stakes have never been higher.

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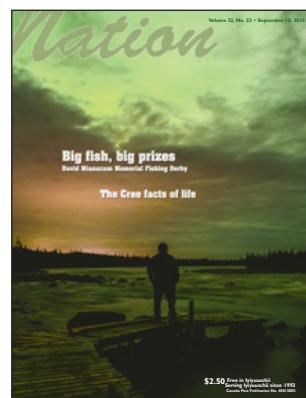


photo by  
Ian Diamond

## Run Josh run!

by Joshua Iserhoff



I love this quote from one of the best movies of all time, *Forrest Gump*: "My momma always said, 'Life was like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get.'"

How profound is that?! Life isn't fair at times, but that's okay. Life goes on. It all depends on how you play the cards you've been dealt. I am a strong believer of putting everything into the Creator's hands and moving on with humility.

As I have heard many times throughout my life: "With every obstacle you face, your character is being built." I live by these words and they seem to have impacted my life in one way or the other. So let's move on...

I was honoured to emcee the Indian Residential Schowol Gathering 2015, hosted by the Cree Nation of Nemaska in collaboration with Nemaska Miyyupimatsiiwin Centre. The location was superb and everyone was freed from any connection to the social network. That's the best thing at Old Nemaska! Full of beauty, peace, soothing waves and no distractions, except for the certain photographer hovering over the grounds taking shots. Hey, Ian! I hope you caught my wave! (I was in my All Saints light blue attire.)

The Walking Out Ceremony, conducted by Abraham Bearskin, was powerfully moving. I took part in the ceremony and I felt what our parents endured when their children were taken away. I felt their loss, their immense loneliness. I felt their pain.

The theme was "Let's bring them home" and during the ceremony as we began to come out of the tipi, I felt a release. As soon as I stepped out I felt I was coming home to Eeyou Istchee. I can't explain it; all I could do was cry. I know I cried for the many people who suffered and the ones who perished during the residential era.

MP Romeo Saganash shared a story about his brother "Johnnysh," who never came home. Romeo's sister Emma found his final resting place only a few years ago, almost 40 years later. Romeo shared his mother's emotional journey. There was not a single dry eye in the tent.

It hits home when you hear our people share their stories. I was angry. I was saddened and yet in all of this, hope was in our midst. We are stronger and we are helping ourselves. All professionals were First Nations! I was so proud of us. Every belief was respected. Eyes were opened and healing is still flowing freely into our people.

As we ended the ceremony, a prayer was said and everyone hugged each other. Surely I thought, that whatever they tried to get rid of, they couldn't. Our culture is strong, our language is here, and our people are still here... We've been through a tough ride, but we never gave up and we never will!

Whatever the circumstance you are faced with, count it all joy. One day, you'll help someone. That is life. To you all, I say: "Run Forrest Run!"

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# The Cree facts of life

## Specialized sex education will remain despite Quebec plan

by Jesse Staniforth

Social media lit up with debate following an August 30 Twitter post by Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come calling the Quebec government's plan to impose a "no-exceptions" sex-education curriculum at some of its schools "disgusting." But many of those responding to Coon Come seemed to be missing the implication of his comments – that Eeyou Istchee has the right to develop and implement a Cree-specific curriculum.

While new sex-ed curriculum in Ontario sparked protest this past year from conservative groups, it was Crees in general who began to voice worries that Quebec's program would impose a one-culture-fits-all program that threatened the existing specialized Eeyou program on sexuality and intimate relations.

That curriculum, called *Chii Kayeh iyaakwaamiih* ("You too, be careful"), was first put into effect nearly a decade ago, and is delivered to high school students by the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay (CBHSSJB) in cooperation with the Cree School Board.

"We have had a program around healthy relationships and healthy sexuality aimed at secondary students – the initial implementation of that began back in 2006-2007," said Dr. Robert Carlin, Director of the CBHSSJB's Regional Public Health Department. "We don't have plans to simply take a program from

elsewhere and adopt it, or put it into our own programming. We've put in quite a bit of work in terms of consultation with the communities to develop the program that we have, which is given to early secondary students."

The *Chii Kayeh* program was developed out of concern over increased rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unplanned pregnancies among young people.

"Obviously sexual health extends well beyond just infections," said Carlin. "What they're learning in the current program is connecting to Cree values and culture, having personal goals and self-esteem, being assertive and resisting peer pressure, problem solving, waiting until later to have sex, using a condom if they're sexually active, sharing with others, and working as a team. That's the program that's been developed to date."

Carlin explains that the program is also a means of continuing an ongoing process of understanding "the cultural elements of intimate relations and sexuality" – those aspects that are specific to Cree history, culture and traditions.

"Our public health department also recognizes the role of the Nishiyuu [Miyupimaatisiiun Department] within the Health Board, who are responsible for tra-

**"We don't have plans to simply take a program from elsewhere and adopt it, or put it into our own programming. We've put in quite a bit of work in terms of consultation with the communities to develop the program that we have."**



ditional approaches,” he said. “If there are activities they feel they should be involved in, related to sexuality, and similarly with consultation with Elders, we’ll adapt our programming and planning according to those needs.”

For those reasons, Carlin said he does not see the news about Quebec's sex-ed curriculum having much impact on Cree schools.

"I hope the provincial program will also follow a public health approach of evaluating and adapting programs to meet the need of the population they serve," he said. "But really, we will continue to improve on this school-based program regionally."

One goal of the program, he said, was to evaluate which approaches were successful for other communities – specifically Aboriginal communities, but also non-Aboriginal communities. All successes elsewhere offer potential benefits by example that can be brought back to serve programs in the Cree Nation.

“The basis of our programs is really to make sure they’re rooted in the community, that they

have support of the CBHSSJB, and in this case also the Cree School Board," said Carlin. "That's always been our focus. So this conversation that started [about Quebec's implementation of a mandatory sex-ed curriculum] – we didn't see it was directed at the [*Chii Kayeh*] program."



An advertisement for Nord-Select. At the top, a green banner with white text reads 'The best affordable gear for Fishing Season is here!'. Below the banner is a large green compass rose logo. To the right of the compass rose is the text 'Distribution' above 'Nord-Select' in a stylized green font. A black silhouette of a fisherman is on the right, holding a fishing rod. A black line connects the compass rose to the fisherman's silhouette. Below the compass rose, the text 'HUNTING • FISHING • GENERAL STORE • FURNITURE' is written in large red letters. At the bottom left, the text 'Matagami: 4 rue Nottaway' is followed by two phone numbers: '819-739-3883' and 'Now in Chisasibi 819-855-2062'. The bottom right contains the email 'marc-andre@nord-select.qc.ca' and the text 'Delivery to James Bay - C.O.D.'. A circular logo for 'NORD-EAST P.D. CAMPING' is located in the bottom right corner, featuring a moose and the text 'NORD-EAST P.D. CAMPING' around the border.

# Request of Name Change Notice

Please take notice that Annie Rupert, residing at Cluster A3-11 P.O.Box 201, Chisasibi, QC in her quality of mother, is requesting from the Directeur de l'Etat Civil to change the name of: Joyce Ann Clara Jonah-Rupert for the one of: Joyce Ann Clara Rupert.

This notice has been signed in Chisasibi on July 24, 2015 by Anne Rupert.



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# O-J's youth revolution

## New Chief Curtis Bosum picks up the torch

by Lyle Stewart

It's been a whirlwind year for the newly elected Chief of Oujé-Bougoumou, Curtis Bosum. The victor in the August 26 runoff election against Anthony Hughboy, Bosum started 2015 as a band councillor before resigning to run Oujé-Bougoumou Enterprise as CEO. Now he's starting his third job this year: leading a young, growing community into a future fraught with challenge.

Many credited the youth vote for the widespread change in Oujé's leadership. Also elected were Deputy Chief Lance Cooper, and councillors Gaston Cooper, Harry Bosum, Janie Wapachee, Sam R. Bosum and Nancy Bosum.

It's a subject Chief Bosum addressed in his inauguration speech September 8.

"Much was said during our recent election campaign about Oujé-Bougoumou being ready to make a transition in its leadership to a new

be witnessing the passing of the torch to younger leaders, I would like to be very clear that this transition will not be about ignoring the past, and the achievements of the past, and it will not be about arrogantly pretending we already know everything."

To that end, Bosum spent his first full day in office in an orientation session with the former chief and council to get status updates on ongoing projects and files.

But there's no denying that, at 37, the new chief is part of new generation of leaders. In an interview with the Nation after his first day on the job, he noted that only two years ago he was still eligible to vote in Youth Council elections. And he reiterated his campaign promise to engage the youth of Oujé-Bougoumou in a dialogue to help chart his community's future.

"They are the next generation of leaders," he said, adding that the local youth chief participated in that



Curtis Bosum with parents Sophie and Abel Bosum at his inauguration as Chief of Oujé-Bougoumou.

building initiative by building capacity for our community. It's vital that we build upon our youth and address their needs and training."

It's part of a dialogue he intends to have with the whole community before setting priorities for this council's mandate. Bosum said he's determined to obtain a wide consensus for the agenda of his term.

Some issues are already apparent.

"Housing, as in First Nations communities across Canada, is a big challenge," he said. "But we need to think outside the box. With our housing program, we need to look beyond our community to determine how to address this issue. This is a

**"It's a four-year journey. I want to recreate something we had in the past: getting our community to unite toward a common goal for the betterment of our members."**

generation," Bosum observed. "While indeed this election may have been, in part, about that, and we may

day's information session at his invitation. "We need to continue the Cree Nation Government's capacity-

dialogue we must have with the community."

Bosum also is looking to expand Cree-run business services in the community, as members currently must drive to Chapais or Chibougamau for groceries and other basic goods. As well, at Oujé-Bougoumou Enterprise, he regularly met with mining and forestry companies, which he also sees as job-creation centres for the roughly 60% of the population under 35 years old.

Another opportunity is the reclamation of old contaminated mine sites, Bosum emphasized. "The work of the com-

mittee examining this issue is well advanced. This is definitely something I'll be looking into, as it is also an opportunity for employment and investment."

Bosum has a unique position as a young political leader, having grown up watching his father, Abel Bosum, during his 13 years as chief during the struggle to found Oujé-Bougoumou as a unified community.

"I was exposed to a lot of stuff I didn't understand at the time," Curtis Bosum recounted. "The meetings in the camps; as a child it was awesome. Going from camp to camp, meeting all

the Elders. I saw the commitment and the sacrifices. The Elders had a vision of having a place to call home. You look at Oujé-Bougoumou now and I think it is far beyond what anyone had imagined."

He says he is humbled by the opportunity to lead O-J into a new era.

"I'd like to thank the community for putting their trust in me and voting for me as chief," Bosum said. "It's a four-year journey. I want to recreate something we had in the past: getting our community to unite toward a common goal for the betterment of our members."



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## Oujé-Bougoumou election contested

Anthony Hughboy, the unsuccessful candidate in the August 26 runoff election for Chief of Oujé-Bougoumou, is contesting the vote results. Hughboy, a former Deputy Chief, has filed a written notice of contestation to returning officer Kenny Loon over the vote that resulted in the election of Curtis Bosum as chief.

Hughboy accused both Bosum and Loon of not following electoral by-laws as established by the Cree-Naskapi Act and Oujé-Bougoumou. "A judge needs to review every by-law... I want to go all the way with this," said Hughboy in a phone interview with the Nation.

When reached for a statement Loon responded, "His charges are distorted and I am waiting on what the court decides." The newly inaugurated Chief Bosum had no comment for the Nation, citing the beginning of legal proceedings.

Hughboy will take his notice of contestation to a judge in Amos who has the power to investigate and decide on the fairness of Oujé-Bougoumou's recent election under the Cree-Naskapi Act. Until that decision is made, Chief Bosum will remain in office.

## CWEIA elect new president

The Cree Women of Eeyou Istchee Association (CWEIA) held its 8th Annual General Assembly at the Washaw Sibi cultural camp over the Labour Day weekend, when delegates elected a new president for the association. With only one vote separating the three candidates – Lisa Petagumskum, Linda Shecapio and Virginia Wabano – a runoff election was required, ending with Mistissini's Shecapio ultimately winning a four-year mandate as the new leader.

More than 40 delegates and observers participated in the AGA. They were briefed on various initiatives during the presentation of annual reports. They also attended workshops such as Testimony and Roots of a Nishiyuu Man, Effective Meetings, Rights of Passage of a Nishiyuu Life Cycle Teachings, and Making a Life: Social Economy.

President-elect Shecapio was welcomed with a blanket ceremony and delivered words of hope and determination to those present, stressing that community and nation building begin within the family. The CWEIA also acknowledged the "tireless devotion and advocacy" of outgoing President Virginia Wabano.

Rounding out the proceedings were the acclamation of Serena Gilpin as Youth Representative, Marlene Kitchen as Inland Representative on the CWEIA Elders Council and Priscilla Martinhunter as Secretary-Treasurer. Rita Masty retained her position as vice-president and Elder representative Irene House will maintain her position until the meeting of Gookumnoch Council.

## Chisasibi B&B set to open

If all goes according to plan, Chisasibi will see the opening of a new bed-and-breakfast and restaurant in October.

The Auberge Maanitaaukimikw, owned and operated by former Chisasibi Director General Louie-Rene Kanatewat, will open its doors as soon as construction is completed and furniture is delivered.

The nine-bedroom establishment will feature rooms named after the nine communities of Eeyou Istchee and views of La Grande River.

Waskaganish artist Tim Whiskeychan, who recently designed the Royal Canadian Mint's \$5 coin, created the logo for the new enterprise.



# BIG FISH, BIG PRIZES AT CO-ED DERBY

by Jesse Staniforth

## Mistissini hosts the first David Mianscum Memorial Fishing Derby

Mistissini's David Mianscum was a respected hunter, trapper, fisher and guide. Though he died last October 27, his memory now lives on in the David Mianscum Memorial Fishing Derby, which had its first edition over the Labour Day weekend. The goal, in part, was to remember Mianscum by being out on the land and water he loved.

"That's how he lived his life," said organizer Stanley Mianscum, David's son. "He was always a fishing guide in the summer, and he always participated in fishing derbies with my mom."

For that reason, the Mianscum Memorial Derby was open specifically to male-female couples. Stanley's mom Lucy Mianscum teamed up with his brother Louie. They competed for a total of \$40,000 in prizes, with a first prize of \$20,000 for the biggest combined catch of the weekend.



2015 Grand Champion of the David Mianscum Memorial derby Eric Menard and Valerie Belanger

**"That's how he lived his life. He was always a fishing guide in the summer, and he always participated in fishing derbies with my mom."**

Stanley Mianscum

Stanley chuckled, noting that his mom didn't hit any of the prizes. "She caught fish too, but not big enough!" he said.

The grand prize went to Eric Menard and Valerie Bélanger of Chibougamau. Stanley noted that Menard had also won \$30,000 at the Big Rock Derby.

"[Menard] always fishes in the derbies, with the Nemaska people, Waswanipi, Chisasibi. He just loves to fish," Stanley observed. "His biggest was 6.96 pounds, but he had three fish to combine for the weekend. He got almost 14 pounds altogether."

Stanley added that the biggest single-day fish of the weekend was 7.09 pounds.



The cake made by Emily S. Brien



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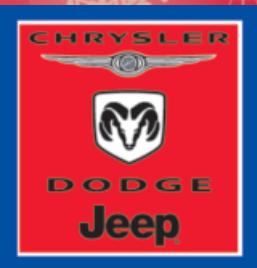
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The organization committee: Stanley, Stephanie, Ruth, Kenny, Conrad, Devine, Nigel and Alexandra

One of several derbies in Mistissini this summer, the Mianscum Memorial came together quickly, Stanley said. "This one was a last-minute thing. We only had a month to prepare."

Still, the derby had good weather for its first two days and only a bit of rain on the third, and all the people it needed to happen. And more important, said Stanley, it achieved its goal.

"[David Mianscum] and my mom would always fish together," he said. "At other derbies it would always be individual, or it would be male-male. We

wanted to have this event so the ladies could also participate. We made it so they could be part of a team. Most of the women – half of them, probably – it was their first fishing derby. They really enjoyed it. We could see all the smiles: everybody was laughing. They were meeting new people, gathering. I heard a lot of them say they wanted to do another derby."

Stanley says they hope to repeat the Mianscum Memorial next year, pending approval from the Mistissini band council.



“Having a great idea is one thing. Taking it to fruition is another. It takes a million steps to do that. You have to pay attention to what people say to do. But you have to pay attention to what they say not to do.”

# Empowered style

## Dorothy Grant blends Haida culture into her fashion designs

by Joel Barde



For over 30 years, Dorothy Grant has created extraordinary fashion designs that meld Haida art with contemporary trends.

Her new creations include a light-blue, silk evening gown with eagle prints and a smart, black suit with a wolf design embroidered on the lapels.

Grant said that many of buyers over the years have told her that her clothes give them a sense of pride when they wear them.

“I want them to feel empowered when they put on the clothing. It’s about more than looking good. It’s about feeling like you can do anything,” she stated.

Grant currently has three labels that run the gamut from everyday wear to haute couture. She counts many high-profile celebrities, politicians and First Nations as customers. Her work is also on display in museums across the country, including the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Gatineau.

Grant’s intricate designs and attention to detail receive a steady stream of media attention. Opening her first store in 1993, she’s now taken her business exclusively online, a successful move that helped her reach international markets.

“With the Internet, people just have to Google Haida or Haida art and they can find my webpage.”

She was an early adopter with the Internet, having set up her first page in 1996. It was not profitable then. But over time, as the technology progressed and more people

became comfortable shopping online, it has become her path to success.

"I think I will teach a class on digital entrepreneurship one day," Grant quipped. "It's really streamlined my business."

However, having mentors over the years has been key. People like Albert Rock, who runs a software business, and Lynn Brown, who runs a marketing company based out of Chicago, have been important sounding boards and sources of guidance.

"A lot of being an entrepreneur is about listening," Grant acknowledged. "Having a great idea is one thing. Taking it to fruition is another. It takes a million steps to do that. You have to pay attention to what people say to do. But you have to pay attention to what they say not to do."

When pressed, she points to two fundamental values an entrepreneur

needs to possess – persistence and belief in your work.

Grant said it's important for communities to support their young artists, to give them the help they need at the start of their careers, a crucial stage for new businesses.

Lately, she's gotten behind a young man named Dyami Thomas, an Aboriginal model-actor who modelled in one of Grant's shows.

After seeing a post Thomas put on Facebook to raise money to attend a modelling competition in New York City, Grant made a significant contribution.

Thomas made it to New York, where he finished fourth in the competition. "I did this because people supported me when I started, by buying my product," Grant explained. "It was time for me to support someone else."



credit Nadya Kwandibens

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# These boots were made for walking

## First Nation footwear artisans Creenisgaa win acclaim by staying true to their roots

by Jeremy East



A good pair of boots wouldn't normally take you from British Columbia all the way to New York City, but the success of Creenisgaa footwear has been whisking First Nations designers Linda Lavallee and Patrick Stewart across the continent for half a decade.

Since 2010, Lavallee of BC's Nisga'a First Nation and her husband Stewart, from Montreal Lake Cree Nation in Saskatchewan, have been designing and hand-making unique boots from their home in Chilliwack, BC. Last year, models were showing off Creenisgaa product on fashion runways in Manhattan. Although Lavallee's business shows no sign of slowing down, she and Stewart have no problem

talking about the company's humble beginnings.

"Linda had been sewing for herself for years and people started to take notice of her clothes and asking if she could make this or that for them," said Stewart. "Eventually she started to experiment with boot designs and came up with the style we have now. Then I started putting some of the artwork we have on clothes onto the boots. People took notice and it's just grown from there."

Those eye-catching designs are inspired by the couple's Cree and Nisga'a heritage. However, just as noteworthy is the traditional process that Lavallee puts into the making of every pair of boots.

It begins with picking the leather and furs, which are often trapped by Lavallee herself or by people from her community.

"Once I have the leather, I figure out who's ordering the boots," said Lavallee. "Then I do a prayer on the leather and smudge it. Once Patrick or Cory do the artwork, it comes back to me and I do another smudge. I want to make sure that when the boot goes out, it goes with goodwill and it comes from the heart."

The sewing process is done entirely by hand, with Stewart and the couple's son Cory contributing the artistic designs featured on every pair. The family business has had offers from large wholesalers to help produce their boots, but Creenisgaa plans to remain a small-scale business, focused on creating a holistic, high-quality product.

When Creenisgaa was selected as one of three First Nation fashion companies to appear in a fashion show in the Big Apple last year, Stewart and Lavallee immediately noticed the differences in design mentality in the corporate world.

"We had about a dozen models assigned to us and we gave each of them a blade of sweetgrass," said Stewart. "A couple of the models said that was the first time a designer had given them anything after a show. To us it was just a way of honouring their participation."

More frequently, Creenisgaa holds fashion shows at powwows or in Native communities. Anyone, young or old, is invited to model.

"It's quite amazing when you see the transformation that happens with young people who have never had the chance to wear makeup or have their hair done or wear nice clothing," said



First Nations designers Patrick Stewart and Linda Lavallee

Stewart. "It's very empowering for them and it's great for self-esteem."

Creenisgaa's next show will be at Fashion Speaks in Kamloops on September 16. Mrs. Universe 2015 winner Ashley Callingbull will be on hand to model the boots. The event will aim to raise money and awareness for missing and murdered Aboriginal Women.

"We'll be showcasing a commemorative pair of boots that we designed at the request of the family of a missing and murdered Aboriginal woman," said Lavallee. "It's an honour to make these boots, but it's also very painful to know that this is happening to families."

Creenisgaa boots are available online for order at [www.creenisgaa.com](http://www.creenisgaa.com). The boots can be made in any size and there are no extra charges for extra large sizes. Custom designs can also be submitted.





# Far North glamour

## Inuit designs gain ground in the global marketplace

by Amy German

Coveted in the north for their exquisite designs, Inuit-made sealskin goods and parkas have a deserved reputation for quality and warmth.

Created by the Makavik Corporation with the help of Victoria Okpik from Quaqtaq, Nunavik Creations produces traditional Inuit-designed parkas, luxurious fur coats and sophisticated accessories for an international market.

Makavik recruited Okpik, a graduate of the distinguished Fashion Design program at Montreal's LaSalle College, shortly after she completed her degree.

"They called me to see if I could help them start up this clothing company back in 2000 when I finished school and that was how I started.

This was a socio-economic development project that was sponsored by Makavik," explained Okpik.

Okpik picked up her trade in the traditional way – at home with her family, working as Nunavimmiut have for thousands of years with caribou furs, sealskins, intestinal remains, thread made of dried tendons and walrus ivory for needles. But Okpik was able to take the Inuit skills at making durable, warm and functional winter garments to a whole new level.

Since traditional garment-making is part of the school curriculum in Nunavik, there is a foundation of skilled craftspeople that helps the industry thrive.

"Most people up north have a basic knowledge on how to make

their own garments because you usually have to make them for your whole family. They don't really wear store-bought clothing in the winter-time; instead they make their own parkas, mittens, hats and kamiks (boots). All of our communities have their own sewing centres so that people can learn and help each other," said Okpik.

While Okpik works with a team of three seamstresses in their Montreal workshop, another sewing centre in Inukjuak employs two full-time seamstresses.

Now 15 years old, the business took a while to get established as the seamstresses needed training to finish garments with furs and leathers, Okpik noted. Then the brand and



logo had to be created. Now their products are starting to take off and the market is expanding.

"The mittens are very popular as are the slippers and miqqluk (hats) at the online store. We have really been working on marketing the line in Europe, in places like Holland, Switzerland, France and Denmark. Our original intention was to have these Inuit-made garments available to the world and this is where we are at right now," explained Okpik.

"A lot of people ask why our products are so expensive, but they are locally made and we have to pay for the women we employ," she added.

While these products don't come cheap – with mittens starting at \$249, sealskin purses at \$449, parkas at \$999 and fur and sealskin coats in the \$4339-\$6089 price range – the pricing is comparable with the rest of the fur industry.

Besides ensuring that there is enough inventory to meet the demand of the online store, Okpik said the company's dedicated seamstresses are also working on the garments for Nunavik team members participating at the Arctic Winter Games.

"The event will take place in March, and we need to be able to produce about 100 coats," said Okpik.



Victoria Okpik from Quaqtaq, Nunavik

Because of the high quality and warmth of their products, Okpik said Nunavik Creations is growing in popularity, and their products are now available in various First Nations communities and Indigenous businesses in the far north and the Quebec City region.

For more info visit [www.nunavikcreations.com](http://www.nunavikcreations.com).

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# Winning the game of life

## Hockey Camp of Hope helps First Nations youth

by Joshua Grant

“Bringing hope to our communities through the game of hockey.” This is the slogan for Brenden Biedermann’s Hockey Camp of Hope (HCH), a professional hockey camp founded by Biedermann and his friend David Cheechoo.

The two both experienced first-hand the obstacles faced by First Nations youth growing up in difficult situations in remote communities (Biedermann hails from Moose Factory, Ontario and Cheechoo from Waskaganish, Quebec). They’ve spent the past few years doing their part to empower the younger Cree generation, instilling positive values and offering the support and leadership teenagers need to succeed both on and off the ice.

Four years ago, Biedermann and Cheechoo got together with Barrett Leganchuk, a former Junior A coach and scout for the NHL’s Winnipeg Jets since 2012.



All three men have an extensive hockey background as players, coaches and trainers and strongly believe that their involvement in the sport kept them out of trouble when they were kids.

Biedermann and Cheechoo’s training team is rounded out by Steve Cheechoo, coach of the Cree Nation Bears and one of the directors of the National Aboriginal Hockey Championships, Jordan Cheechoo, who also coaches with the Bears and works with Waswanipi’s minor hockey program, Adam Wowchuk, goalie instructor and former Junior A and AAA goalie, and Mervin Cheechoo, mentor and workshop facilitator.

It’s better to be in a rink on a Friday or a Saturday night than out roaming the streets, Biedermann emphasized.



“We talk about things like mental toughness. How to keep going when it feels like the whole world is against you, whether it’s a tough day at home, at school or at the rink. We share our own experiences at this camp.”

"We all played the game at fairly high levels and most of us grew up living in Native communities," he said. "Hockey is our number-one sport so we put our heads together and thought about how we could address the different problems kids are facing, getting sucked into things like drugs and alcohol and abuse. We use hockey as a platform to help them stay off the streets and out of trouble and we encourage them that if they do get into trouble, they shouldn't be afraid to ask for help."

The Hockey Camp of Hope offers programs in Moose Factory and Waskaganish. They recently ran an elite camp July 12-18 in Sudbury that attracted AA, AAA and Junior A players from Aboriginal communities in both Ontario and Quebec.

A typical day at camp consists of 90 minutes on the ice working fundamentals like skating, shooting, passing, stickhandling and team play, followed by dry-land training that involves cardio, weightlifting and recreational activities like baseball. Participants get a break to relax before an evening of workshops, sometimes complemented by a meal.

At the elite event, ran by coaches with experience in the NHL, AHL and NCAA, a major focus is developing leadership skills amongst the teenagers.

Biedermann noted that a lot of talented athletes who compete in Val-d'Or were in attendance at last month's camp in Sudbury.

  
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"These guys are the ones that everyone looks up to, the ones that have a chance to go into the OHL or the Quebec Majors. We want to let them know that they need to make smart choices and that there's a hundred other eyes watching them and how they handle themselves. We want them to follow their dream, but we also want them to take good care of themselves along the way."

Off-ice workshops are a big part of what the Hockey Camp of Hope offers. Biedermann and his staff help prepare players and parents for the challenges they face both in the arena and in everyday life.

"We talk about things like mental toughness," he said. "How to keep

going when it feels like the whole world is against you, whether it's a tough day at home, at school or at the rink. We share our own experiences at this camp. Most of us have been caught up in that lifestyle of drugs and alcohol at one time or another and some of our people are really trapped in that struggle."

He added that they strongly encourage parental involvement and try to speak to the parents when they're at the rink.

Biedermann hopes to continue to expand the Hockey Camp of Hope's operations into other areas of Eeyou Istchee.

"It's fun, we enjoy it," he said. "We want to do anything we can

to help these kids. You would have a hard time finding a group of individuals who care more for these kids. They're our neighbours and our relatives. It's a relationship we've built with the communities over the years that we want to keep building."

He mentioned that the camp would like to expand to Wemindji and Mistissini.

"We try to be available whenever we can: fall, winter and summer. We can do weekend camps, whatever we're asked to do. If somebody's interested we'll do everything in our power to make it happen. We don't want to be just a hockey camp, we want to offer a service for the kids and for the rest of the community as well."

In the last two years in Waskaganish, HCH has drawn in over 100 participants aged 13 and up.

Anyone interested in the Camp of Hope can visit [www.hcoh.ca](http://www.hcoh.ca) or call Biedermann at 705-658-2239 or Dave Cheechoo at 819-895-4164.

"We're always open to have more helping hands and we're always willing to lend a hand to work with any of the communities in the Cree Nation," said Biedermann. "We'll go above and beyond to work with them into the future."

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### Please send your resume to:

Director of Human Resources, Cree Nation of Wemindji, 21 Hilltop Drive, P.O. Box 60, Wemindji, QC, J0M 1L0, or by email: [hrdirector@wemindji.ca](mailto:hrdirector@wemindji.ca)

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# Frontier learning

## Cree camps deliver literacy achievements

by Amy German

Back for a third year to prevent summer learning loss for the children of Eeyou Istchee, the Frontier College and Cree School Board Summer Literacy Camps have even stronger results to present after a summer of reading, writing and fun-based learning for kids in nine of the Cree communities.

According to Melanie Valcin, the Quebec Manager for Frontier College, attendance jumped by 25 students to a total of 425 this summer. But what really stood out are the 184 parents who visited the camps at least once over the summer.

Parental involvement, Valcin noted, has a significant impact on a child's learning success.

"This shows that parents are really supportive of this summer learning program for their children. They wanted to witness the activities going on in that camp and also take part in it," said Valcin.

"From year one to year three we now see a real increase in the interest of parents; they now really want to know what we are trying to do and want to get involved in it."

According to a survey of parents, 93% said that their child had improved literacy skills as a result of the camp,

85% said that their child reads more and 98% said that their child was more prepared for school. On top of that, 97% of parents said their children were able to maintain their skills over the summer.

Going into a third year of the program also came with its own advantages as many camp counsellors were coming with the experience of previous years.

"The way we have our camp counsellors intervening with the children has improved with every year because we have been able to train and support them a lot better," said Valcin. "We have been learning every year and we pass this knowledge on to the new counsellors who we hire every year."

With 18 Crees out of the 40 counsellors hired this year, Valcin said that more Cree was spoken within the camps as an alternative to English or French.

"The parents are very pleased with this program and this has been consistent every year. They like that their children have access to a day camp where they are having fun in an environment that is safe and nurturing and on top of that they are learning and practicing their reading and writing," said Valcin.



Reading with the Waskaganish Youth Chief

“

From year one to year three we now see a real increase in the interest of parents; they now really want to know what we are trying to do and want to get involved in it.

”



## Playing games

by Xavier Kataquapit

**I** come from a video-game generation. I was 12 when I played my first home video-game console.

My family was not able to afford such luxuries as video games when we were very young. It wasn't until the early 1990s when our family could afford extras. I can remember spending hours with my brothers Joseph and Paul playing Super Nintendo games like Super Mario Bros, F-Zero, Double Dragon, Mortal Combat and Star Fox. Our friends would come around and we in turn would go and visit their homes to play on their systems.

Life was not easy for us as children on a remote Native community so these games provided us an easy escape into other make-believe worlds. Mom and dad frowned on us playing too long as there were many chores and work that had to be done around the house. They regularly stopped our gameplay to send us to our work or to get us to go outside.

I have to admit that, back then, the games were relatively simple and after a few rounds, it was easy to figure out what worked, how to cheat and how to beat the game. That's why, fortunately, I quickly became bored with games.

In the mid-1990s, gaming exploded and it quickly became too expensive to buy the latest, greatest games. Rather, I enjoyed player-versus-player video games and in particular the EA NHL hockey series, as

developers came out with a new version each year. My brothers and friends and I spent many weekends playing virtual tournaments.

When we got together for our digital hockey competitions, there was always plenty of uncontrollable laughter especially since we were fueled by soda pop, candy and chips. Often, our parents or other siblings would find us rolling on the floor when we tried to explain our gameplay and we could never communicate with someone outside the game why it was so funny.

As an adult I took a break from gaming. I was getting busy with my own work and the new games were too expensive, too complicated, too violent or too individualistic. I never really enjoyed first-person shooters where the goal was to kill endless characters to rack up points. The best thing about gaming for me was being part of a familiar and fun group that enjoyed doing the same thing.

I was not one of those people who purchased an expensive Xbox or Playstation. Instead, I moved on to gaming on my computer with more creative strategy games.

A year ago a young friend of mine, Jack Vokes, introduced me to a simple game called Minecraft and since then I have enjoyed a taste of that old gaming fun I remembered from long ago. Minecraft is an open-ended creative game that keeps score if you are watching, creative if you want it that way, competitive if you are playing

with others or, what I enjoy most, cooperative.

The gameplay is simple – your character can freely explore over ground, water, forests and deserts. This game is about architecture and building as you can dig deep underground or raise a building high into the sky. Minecraft has no digital world filled with high-definition monsters, demons, warlocks, witches, soldiers, attack helicopters, space ships or aliens. There isn't even a complicated storyline. Rather Minecraft is just a simple world that is easy to load, easy on bandwidth and simple to play.

I have grown to love the game because of its simplicity and ease of access. Instead of buying a big-name console with high-definition graphics in order to play a \$50 game title that goes on and on with dramatic storytelling, character development and epic hours of long gameplay, I play this simple \$20 game on my computer and connect with hundreds of people in a simple, relaxed open gameplay.

Minecraft is the game I would suggest for any young person interested in gaming. It is not violent and hell-bent on promoting virtual realistic death and destruction like many popular titles. Instead it is a creative game that leaves it to the individual to play with their imagination. I only wish I had Minecraft around when I was 12 years old. It would have helped me in terms of creativity and construction techniques.

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